

# TASK FORCE HIGHLIGHTS

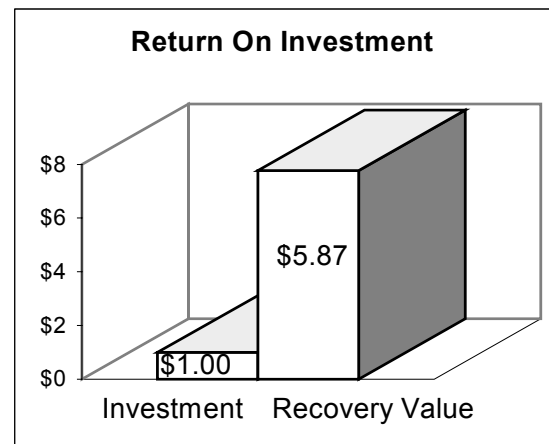
- **“Good Samaritan”** The Hamtramck Police Department uses a “bait” vehicle that they place in a high theft area with the keys in the ignition. One night they were on surveillance of that vehicle, and a man walked by the car, opened the door, and looked inside. He walked away, but came back a few minutes later and got in the vehicle. Before officers could respond, the man got out of the vehicle and walked into a nearby store. When officers caught up with him and asked what he was doing, he replied that some fool had left the keys in their car and he had just turned them over to the store manager so it wouldn’t get stolen!
- **“Stealing Cars from Police?”** Bill wanted to buy his neighbor Bob’s car, but Bob didn’t want to sell it. Bob’s car then had an engine fire and was towed to the Grand Rapids PD impound lot. Bill took forged sale and title documents to the Secretary of State and got a title to Bob’s car. Bill then went to the Grand Rapids PD impound lot, showed fake ownership documents, and paid \$180 to get the car released. Later that day, Bob went to the impound lot for his car but it had already been stolen by Bill. Grand Rapids Team officers recovered Bob’s car and arrested Bill for title fraud. Three other retagged vehicles were recovered at Bill’s place.
- **“A Picture is Worth a 1,000 Words”** A Saginaw Team detective was on surveillance in a gas station looking for a recently stolen car when that car actually pulled in for gas. The detective got out of his car and took a picture of the driver with his digital camera. The suspect quickly drove off, a short chase followed, and the suspect bailed out and fled. The detective then took the digital photo to a juvenile detention center where several young car thieves immediately recognized the suspect. Several warrants were served, and the suspect is now awaiting trial.
- **“It Helps to Have Contacts”** Our West Grand Neighborhood organizer in Grand Rapids, who is a retired police officer, met with an officer/friend from neighboring Kentwood PD. Based on that meeting, the organizer put on a theft prevention program for a large community group. The Kentwood PD Chief was in attendance and

was impressed with the excellence of the presentation. The result was that the organizer was invited to do a major VIN etching program at Kentwood’s annual community safety day. Thus, a chance meeting with a friend led to a significant prevention program and exposure in another city.

- **“Quiet Neighbors are Best”** The Genesee County Team (GAIN) was involved with a case that started out with Jim, who lives in a modest neighborhood and is awakened by the roar of an engine. He went to the window to see a 2001 Corvette being revved up in the neighbor’s yard and finally driven into a shed. Jim knows the neighbor cannot afford expensive vehicles, but he goes back to bed. About 2 a.m., Jim is again awakened by the sound of hammering. Jim looked out the window and discovered the Corvette did not fit into the shed, so the neighbor is building an addition to cover the car. About a week later, Jim is awakened again by the sound of his neighbor cutting up the Corvette, and he called 911 out of frustration. GAIN was called in, and officers found the Corvette all dissected. The neighbor admitted making the car disappear so the owner could collect on insurance. After a lengthy interrogation, GAIN arrested both the owner and the neighbor.

## Return on Investment

During 2002, ATPA grantees achieved the following: 3,633 recovery incidents; 2,987 arrests; and nearly 2,700 vehicles etched. The law enforcement grantees recovered \$5.87 for every \$1 the ATPA invested.



## TASK FORCE HIGHLIGHTS, Continued

The following table displays the performance of ATPA law enforcement auto theft consortiums.

YEAR	ARRESTS	\$ VALUE RECOVERED
1989-1997	19,169	174,179,200
1998	2,423	26,560,315
1999	2,990	34,424,931
2000	3,336	40,472,663
2001	3,346	35,168,453
2002	2,987	31,758,922
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>34,251</b>	<b>\$342,564,484</b>

- “Old Habits are Hard to Break”** The ATPA-funded Auto Theft Training Coordinator, who is a retired state trooper, was obtaining training photos at a commercial vehicle weigh scale station when the first truck of the day pulled in to be checked. Our coordinator observed that the public VIN did not match the commercial VIN. Upon further investigation at the scene, it turned out that the vehicle was a 1993 Freightliner retagged as a 1998 and stolen out of Illinois in 1999. The vehicle was seized, and follow-up investigation was conducted by the MSP Auto Theft Unit. The value of the stolen vehicle was \$30,000.
- “Careful, Someone May be Listening”** The Genesee County Prosecutor was involved in a case in which an 18-year-old left a party where underage drinking had occurred. He found a partygoer’s car with the keys still in it, stole the car, drove it home, and parked it in the woods behind his house. The 18-year-old then called a friend and told him what he had done—on a cordless phone. A neighbor heard the whole conversation and called the police. Eventually, the defendant confessed to everything, including wiping the car down for fingerprints. The judge found it amusing that he wiped the car of fingerprints but parked it behind his own house! The 18-year-old pled guilty to unlawful use of an auto.
- “Yahoos Who Really Yahoo”** The Western Wayne Team reported a case of five “individuals” who, after a big night of partying, took one of their trucks out to do some “Baja-ing” at the country property of a grandfather. The Chevy S-10 4x4 got stuck, and they burned up the engine and transmission in the process. What to do? Well, they cut up the truck into pieces with saws and torches and buried it in a 5 x 20-foot trench. Then they reported it stolen to Detroit PD and put in a fraudulent insurance claim for \$19,000. However, a call to the HEAT Tip line led a trail to them. The owner confessed and directed police to the buried treasure. He had to pay back the \$19,000, plus expenses of \$600 to rent a backhoe to dig out the truck, and was finally sentenced to 18 months probation. An expensive night of partying.
- “Bad Timing for Bad Guy”** The Washtenaw Area Team had just finished a stolen identity case where the person was arrested after he purchased a 2001 Tahoe with fraudulent identity. They had taken the subject to jail, as well as transported the vehicle back to Ann Arbor, when they pulled up to a red light next to a 2003 Cadillac Escalade with temporary plates in the window. Team members discussed who owns these expensive vehicles, and they glanced at the driver of the Escalade. It was the wife of the person they had under arrest! After lodging the arrested subject, they made calls to area Cadillac dealers in the area, and yes--the subject had gotten another fraudulent identity and purchased the Escalade. It was also recovered and another warrant was issued. The subject is currently in prison.
- “Status Seeker”** Detroit Arson investigators found a late model Infinity burned in Detroit where there did not appear to be a motive. The vehicle ignition was intact, it had low miles and was paid for, it was not stripped, and it didn’t have collision damage. The vehicle driver, a young lady in high school, was from a wealthy family. A new Detroit ordinance requires that owners of burned vehicles must be interviewed before an insurance claim is processed. Investigators questioned the high school senior about her vehicle, and she finally admitted that all her friends drove Lexus’s. She knew her parents would buy her a Lexus if the Infinity disappeared!

## TASK FORCE HIGHLIGHTS, Continued

- ***“Who is Really Who”*** The Macomb Auto Theft Squad (MATS) investigated a case where an OUIL traffic stop of a 1998 Lexus was very suspicious due to non-matching identities. The MATS Team used high-tech procedures to confirm the suspect’s true identity. He had been using the identity of an Oakland County man for the past several years and had fraudulently purchased the Lexus. He was able to post bond on the OUIL, and a few days later called MATS about how he could get his car out of the impound lot. It just so happens that MATS was interviewing the real Oakland man when the suspect (fake man) called the MATS office claiming to be the real victim. When the suspect arrived at the impound lot for his Lexus, he was arrested by the awaiting officers. It turned out that the fake Oakland man had purchased other cars in the past few years, and the victim had been trying to clear his name and credit ever since. The suspect had been out on probation for using the real Oakland man’s identity in another recent car purchase.
- ***“A Guy’s Got to Make a Living”*** The Oakland County Team conducted an inspection of an auto parts supplier based on a tip that the two store-owners were fencing stolen tires and rims. The team observed that many tires and rims were at the location. About a week later, a county Pontiac dealership had 15 tires and rims stolen off the new car lot. The next morning, team members returned to the parts shop and found the stolen tires and rims. The owners stated that the parts had just arrived that morning, but they had no receipts or paperwork regarding the tires. The owners indicated that the booty may have been stolen, but also added “I have to make a living, don’t I?” The team investigated further and found that a 928 Porsche inside the garage had been built with parts from another Porsche sitting outside the garage, which was stolen. The two owners were arrested for operating a chop shop.
- ***“The Case of the Monster Trucks”*** The SCAR Team entered into a case after some parts were stolen from a large construction vehicle. They followed up on a tip from the victim who had placed an ad in a local paper promising a reward for the parts recovery. The tip generated a search warrant on the tipster! Nearly 350 stolen parts and property were recovered from six counties in southwest Michigan and involved 14 different victims who happily got their equipment back. It appears the suspect liked to steal heavy construction equipment in order to build his own monster-type trucks. He pled guilty to operating a chop shop and had his own equipment forfeited. SCAR had dealt with the crook five years earlier on a different stolen vehicle case.
- ***“Cash Would be Better?”*** The Downriver Team broke a scam operation that involved many victimized citizens stretching from Detroit to Lansing. The suspects would “buy” vehicles advertised by owners utilizing cashiers’ checks that were later found to be counterfeit. The team set up a sting operation by advertising a newer Denali for sale. Shortly, a team member was contacted by the potential “buyer” who tendered an offer using a cashier’s check. The offer was accepted and, upon receipt of the phony check, four suspects were arrested. This led to a search of their residence where the team seized blank cashiers’ checks, typewriters, and evidence of other purchases. A trial date has been set.

### Vehicle Theft Rates

From 1986 to 2001, both Michigan’s population and registered vehicle fleet have grown 9% and 25% respectively. Despite these factors, Michigan’s theft rate per 100,000 population and per 100,000 registered vehicles has fallen dramatically.

THEFT RATE	1986	2001	% CHANGE
Population	787.5	523.6	-33.51%
Vehicles	999.5	579.8	-41.99%